

Raves and raps for a new grading service

By Roger Boye

WHEN THE coin grading service of the American Numismatic Association (ANA) opened for business early this month, not all professional hobbyists cheered.

In fact, a prominent California dealer warned collectors to "exercise caution" when asking the ANA to evaluate the condition of their coins.

"The concept of the service is excellent, but the ANA needs to refine its techniques," said Q. David Bowers, cofounder of a large and respected coin firm. Among other things, he wants the ANA staff to consult frequently with dealers as coins are graded.

"Judging the condition of a coin is a critical but subjective task. The ANA needs to be very careful, especially at the start," Bowers said. The longtime hobbyist is also president of the Professional Numismatists Guild, an organization of nearly 200 dealers who strive to uphold ethical business standards.

Coin dealers know all too well that condition is an important factor in determining a coin's "collector value." For example, a 1932-D quarter in choice, uncirculated condition sells for more than \$500; the same coin in "about uncirculated" condition goes for \$150.

Bowers described the three ANA staff members who are grading coins as "fine, conscientious individuals," and he praised the ANA's coin authentication service managed by two of those men. But he suggested that the staff lacks the in-depth experience needed to grade all coins accurately.

At a lengthy meeting last month, Bowers told the ANA board of governors about his concerns. Several ANA staff members attended the meeting, including Thomas K. DeLorey, who will do most of the grading.

"We had been planning all along to be very cautious, and we will be consulting with a lot of hobby experts," DeLorey said earlier this month. At the February meeting, the two other grading staffers also pledged to seek advice from "outside experts." Nevertheless, Bowers still is not convinced the service will operate as smoothly as the ANA anticipates.

Meanwhile, DeLorey said many collectors have started sending in coins to be graded. The ANA's Certification Service charges a small fee—usually about 5 per cent of the coin's appraised value—to authenticate and grade a coin. For a fee schedule, write the service at 818 N. Cascade Av., Colorado Springs, Colo. 80903.